

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Progressive Distributor

Quick Links:

Distribution
Industry News
Industry Links
Directories &
Product Catalog
Archives
Subscriptions
Media Guide
eResponse

Home
MRO Today
MRO Explorer

Search MRO Today
and
Progressive Distributor



Progressive Distributor

The difference between managing and leading

Berating salespeople is not an effective management technique. Effective sales leaders know how to motivate and lead their troops to greater success.

by Jim Pancero

"My sales are down. No one seems to be buying anything and even the few who are ready to buy are in a 'lowest price' feeding frenzy. Not only is the economy really bad but my sales team is even worse. They are depressed, have low energy and find more and more reasons to be in the office doing paperwork than out making sales calls."

Have you made any of these statements? If so, what are you going to do about it?

Sales managers work hard to reduce costs, improve operating efficiencies and do everything possible to keep the doors open. These are critical responsibilities, but they only maintain their environment. Sales leaders do everything sales managers do, but also realize their most important responsibility is building and growing the business. Sales leaders realize that when their people are firmly stuck in the mud, they need to be pulled out.

Salespeople tend to be the most volatile of all employees. Their attitudes and energy are higher than anyone else when things are great but crash faster and get more depressed than anyone else when times are tough. Where are the attitudes, energy and work efforts of your salespeople right now?

When salespeople feel depressed and unhappy with business, they tend to slow down in a tough economy more than the overall market does. Your job is to help your team understand they cannot control the size of the pie but they can control the size of their slice.

As a sales leader, how are you leading your sales team through this tough economy and even tougher selling environment? Now is the most critical time to energize your troops and build your team's morale.

Remember, abnormal behavior in an abnormal environment is normal. Your people are acting normal if they are unhappy, depressed, complaining and not working as hard as they used to. Isn't human nature amazing? We are in a totally different economy with new and more aggressive competitors entering our market every day. We also have to deal with buyers who are much less loyal, more demanding and expect significantly lower prices. Even with all of these market changes, most salespeople have changed very little, sell the exact same way to the same people they did five



**Check out
these
stories:**

[New models
of sales](#)

[When good
isn't good
enough](#)

years ago and keep waiting for the economy to improve their sales levels.

How you handle your team has a direct impact on your potential success or failure. Your people don't need a drill sergeant who tries to motivate the troops by yelling and threatening. The economy and their business are depressing enough without you also becoming a negative irritant. Lead by affirming, staying positive and following this series of actions:

- 1) Stabilize and qualify your existing customers.
- 2) Initiate an aggressive new prospecting program.
- 3) Begin some type of sales training to energize and focus your team.

Action 1: Stabilize and qualify your existing customers

Existing customers tend to be one of the first casualties when sales reps get depressed and slow down their selling efforts. The first step in growing your business is to make sure you do not lose existing business. A down economy generates a lot of new business prospecting efforts by the competition. How many of your competitors are actively working to establish new business relationships with your current accounts? What are you doing to make sure your existing customers are protected from these attacks?

Go back to your existing customers to affirm and stabilize your relationship with them. Consider making joint sales rep/sales manager calls on all of your most important accounts. Then, beginning with their largest accounts, send your reps out to interview and evaluate how your company is doing with the rest of their territory. Ask every customer:

- "How do you feel about the job we currently do for you and your company?"
- "How can we improve the way we supply and support you?"
- "What do you wish we did more of compared to what other companies do for you?"
- "Can we evaluate how you use what you buy from us to see if we can either reduce your costs or increase your efficiencies?"
- "Are there other areas, departments or locations within your company where we could help lower costs, improve efficiencies or in any other way improve business operations?"

Most sales organizations ask these questions after they have lost the business, not before. You might also consider offering current customers additional discounts or volume incentives to make sure they know you are interested in them. The best way to keep competitors away from current accounts is to make sure your existing customers feel they are important to you, get plenty of attention from you and are treated to the same discounts you offer new prospects.

Action 2: Initiate an aggressive new prospecting program

As you work to ensure the stability of your current accounts, you also want to lead your team in an aggressive new business initiative. How much new business prospecting did your team initiate this year? How much business is being won by your competition at accounts your team has not

called on?

Help guide your sales team through the following steps in order to initiate and implement a successful new business prospecting program:

Step 1: Identify who your best or core customers are. Core customers are accounts that receive the most benefits and paybacks from buying your full line of products or services. These are companies whose business you'll most likely win in a competitive battle because you are the best fit for their business. Who are the best prospects (or industries) for you and your team to go after first? Be aware that most managers feel this is a useless question and believe everyone in their company already knows the answer. Try asking your people to write down the top four types of companies or markets where you have the best chance of winning. Most organizations are surprised at the variety of answers.

Step 2: Identify your strongest initial selling message that will gain the most attention from a new prospect. The toughest question to answer is when a prospect looks you in the eye and says, "You're the fifth vendor I have talked to this week about this. Based on all the competitive alternatives available to me, why do I want to buy from you?" It's useless to send your sales team out hunting for prospects if you do not give them any ammunition. Hold a planning session with your team to discuss the best way to answer a prospect who asks this critical new business question.

Step 3: Identify when and how much time each sales rep will commit to new business prospecting over the next 30 days. The majority of your sales team will tell you how excited they are about your new business prospecting efforts, and then will not make any new business calls. New business prospecting remains one of the most distasteful parts of any sales job. Prospecting requires you to go to strangers and get rejected on a fairly high frequency. No normal person likes to spend the day being rejected by strangers. Get solid commitments for specific days and times when salespeople will prospect, or else they will never have enough time to make new account calls. In addition to ongoing prospecting commitments, also consider organizing special "Blitz Days" where your entire team commits to one or two days a month spending all of their time making new business prospecting calls. Make it an event that either starts off with a breakfast or ends at a bar so it becomes a positive experience and an exciting and energizing break from their territory.

Be aware that not following through on this commitment of time and energy step is one of the biggest reasons new account prospecting programs fail. What can you do as a sales leader to make sure they are committed, equipped and actually working at building new business? When your team successfully completes this 30-day program, consider renewing the program for another 30 days and then finally integrate it as a permanent, ongoing part of their territory management.

Step 4: Monitor your team's new business efforts to ensure they make their calls, deliver a solid message and continue their calling efforts. For the vast majority of sales teams, new business prospecting programs become less of a focus and ultimately fail unless you continue to monitor their prospecting efforts on a regular and consistent basis.

Action 3: Begin some type of sales training to energize and focus your team.

Energizing and focusing your sales team are two major contributors to changing your sales team's behaviors and selling direction. A slow market in a down economy is one of the best times to conduct sales training. Unfortunately, this is also the time you can least afford to spend money on training.

Training on new ideas to improve the personal selling skills of your people is one of the best ways to improve their attitude and to re-energize a sales force. Be aware that product or technical training tends to have no impact on the morale or energy of your sales force. They need to feel they are improving how they can reach and sell additional business.

If you cannot afford an outside trainer, consider looking at sales training video packages. These have a relatively low cost yet can achieve a high level of new ideas. Still too expensive? Then go to your local bookstore and pick out a few books on selling that could help your team. Assign the book to one or more of your people and ask them to lead your team in a discussion of the ideas outlined in the book as well as what types of actions your team can implement.

The goal is to get them thinking and talking about new ways they can do their job of selling. The bottom line is you need your team to apply more energy, creativity, effort and intelligence to their selling efforts. What can you do to get your people to look at their job and territory with a fresh view?

Suggestions to start your change process

Suggestion No. 1. Have your entire team read this article and then lead them through a discussion about the ideas covered. Consider asking them:

How relevant is this article to what we are facing as a sales team?

Based on the suggestions outlined in this article, what should we do next that could have the greatest impact?

How committed are you to personally working to change and improve the way you sell?

Will you allow me as your manager to help you and the rest of our sales team through this process and to be your coach?

Suggestion No. 2. Hold a one-day retreat as soon as possible to focus, brainstorm and plan a new course of action. You will have a higher probability of success if you

work as a team. A shared experience of change generates more energy than someone working alone. Also, remember to keep this meeting positive and moving forward. This is not the time to reflect on what went wrong. Plan and strategize how you can move forward.

Suggestion No. 3. Increase your one-on-one and team management communications with your reps. If you want to generate change within your team, have more face time discussing, coaching and leading. Spend more time riding with each of your reps. Talk to them daily to ask how it's going and how they feel about all of this. Keep your message and energy positive. Remember, you are coaching and leading them into positive change, not whipping them into submission.

To keep your energy and communications positive, consider working through the steps of change below. It is impossible to announce a new business prospecting program and immediately start looking for and measuring results. Any change takes time. Your people need to work through the four steps of change measurement.

The first step of change is attitude. This is something you can immediately measure. Do they have the right attitude about what you are attempting to do to help the team and your organization? The second step of change is effort. Are they actually implementing what you are asking or suggesting? They do not have to be doing it right, as long as they are attempting to do something different. The third step of change is progress. Are they starting to make things happen? They do not have to have actually sold anything yet, but do they have prospects who are progressing through the selling process?

The fourth and final step is results. Only after you work with your people on their attitudes, efforts and progress can you finally look for and measure results. Working through each of these sequential steps as a coach and leader allows you to manage, measure and encourage your team through the entire change process.

Suggestion No. 4. After building new momentum, continue to coach and lead your team to maintain their energy and attention to these new selling efforts. Following these four suggestions can provide a way to lead your team through this challenging economy. But any change will disappear in a matter of days or weeks unless you continue to work daily to maintain their focus and new selling efforts. You are the most critical component to the long-term success of changing and improving your sales force.

Reach Jim Pancero at (800) 526-0074, via e-mail at jpancero@pancero.com or on the Web at www.pancero.com.

This article originally appeared in the 2003 I.D.A. Business Expo issue of Progressive Distributor. Copyright 2003.

[back to top](#)
[archives](#)

[back to sales management](#)